

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 IO-10 ISO-00 SAM-01 SAB-01 PM-04 H-02

INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 DHA-02 ORM-01 OPR-02 AID-05 SSO-00 NSCE-00

USIE-00 INRE-00 A-01 SY-05 OC-05 CCO-00 /102 W

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O R 221444Z SEP 75

FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6315

INFO AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI

AMCONSUL ADANA

AMEMBASSY ALGIERS

AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY ANKARA

AMEMBASSY ATHENS

USINT BAGHDAD

AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMCONSUL DHAHRAN

AMEMBASSY DOHA

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

USMISSION GENEVA

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MANAMA

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMCONSUL STUTTGART

AMEMBASSY TEHRAN

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

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CIA WASHDC

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BEIRUT 11803

GENEVA FOR SAUNDERS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PINS, LE

SUBJECT: LEBANON IN ROUND FOUR: AN ASSESSMENT

1. SUMMARY: ROUND 4; SKIPPING FROM ZAHLE TO NORTH LEBANON TO BEIRUT VIRTUALLY WITHOUT PAUSE, HAS GRAVELY WEAKENED THE LEBANESE BODY POLITIC. THE VIOLENCE HAS PROVED TOO MUCH FOR THE GOL TO COPE WITH ALONE. THE SECURITY FORCES HAVE HAD TO CALL ON COMMUNAL LEADERS, MODERATE PALESTINIANS, AND NOW THE SYRIANS TO HELP DAMPEN THE TROUBLES. IN THE PROCESS, THE FORMAL GOVERNMENT HAS EFFECTIVELY CEDED TO A SHOW GOVERNMENT WHEREIN SEMI-INDEPENDENT "BARONS" LIKE JUMBLATTGN GEMAYEL, AND 'ARAFAT WIELD GREAT POWER AND MUST BE WON OVER. BUT THIS "GOVERNMENT" TOO HAS FAILED TO MEET THE CHALLENGE. NEARLY ALL PARTIES OTHER THAN SYRIA AND THE PLO HAVE LOST GROUND, ALTHOUGH NOT ALL ARE AWARE OF IT. MEANWHILE, THE FIGHT GOES ON. END SUMMARY.

2. LEBANON HAS NOT YET EMERGED FROM ROUND 4, ALTHOUGH AN END TO THE STRIFE SEEMED CLOSE MORE THAN ONCE AND MAY NOT BE FAR AWAY. UNLIKE PREVIOUS ROUNDS, WHICH WERE LOCALIZED IN ONE URBAN SECTOR, THIS OUTBREAK HAS SKIPPED FROM ZAHLE TO NORTH LEBANON TO BEIRUT LIKE A FEVER COURSEING THROUGH DIFFERENT PARTS OF AN ORGANISM. THE FEVER HAS DRASTICALLY WEAKENED THE LEBANESE BODY POLITIC. IT IS ALREADY POSSIBLE TO SEE THE DAMAGE INFLICTED.

INCAPACITY OF THE GOVERNMENT

3. VALIANT EFFORTS OF THE CABINET LEADERSHIP AND SECURITY FORCES NOTWITHSTANDING, THE VIOLENCE HAS PROVED TOO MUCH FOR THE GOL TO COPE WITH ALONE. THIS BECAME EVIDENT VERY EARLY AS THE OUTBREAK IN ZAHLE (AUGUST 28-SEPT 6) TOOK A MOSLEM-VS.-CHRISTIAN COLORATION. THE SUPERCHARGED COMMUNAL EMOTIONS WERE FINALLY DAMPENED BY THE SECURITY FORCES, BUT ONLY WITH HELP FROM RELIGIOUS LEADERS AND MOD-CONFIDENTIAL

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ERATE PALESTINIANS. IN THE TRIPOLI-ZGHORTA AND AKKAR TROUBLES (SEPT 2-11), THE EXPEDIENT OF ARMY INTERVENTION PROVED EFFECTIVE AS PART OF THE EQUATION BUT HAD TO BE LIMITED TO A PASSIVE BUFFER ROLE TO AVOID UNCONTROLLABLE MOSLEM-LEFTIST REACTION IN TRIPOLI. MODERATE PALESTINIANS AGAIN PROVED INDISPENSIBLE MEDIATORS, BEING UNIQUE PERSONA GRATE THERE WITH THE ENTRENCHED TRIPOLI LEFTISTS. AS FOR BEIRUT'S STILL CONTINUING AGONY, WHICH HAS A LEFT-RIGHT AS WELL AS

MOSLEM-CHRISTIAN CHARACTER, SYRIA IS EMERGING AS THE KEY FACTOR, AGAIN WITH THE HELP OF PALESTINIANS AND INTER-COMMUNAL NEGOTIATIONS.

4. THE PICTURE COMES THROUGH OF A COUNTRY WITH TWO GOVERNMENTS, NOT ONE. THE FIRST GOVERNMENT IS THE FORMAL ONE HEADED NOMINALLY BY PRES FRANGIE AND HAVING INTERNAL SECURITY FORCES AND (IN THEORY) THE ARMY AS ITS POLICING ARM. IT PLAYS A ROLE, BUT A RELATIVELY MINOR ONE. RIGHTISTS AND EVEN MODERATE LEBANESE NATIONALISTS, NOT ILLOGICALLY, BELIEVE ITS POSITION SHOULD REGHTFULLY BE STRONGER. THE OTHER GOVERNMENT IS CLOSER TO THE REAL POWER STRUCTURE; A GROUP OF SEMI-INDEPENDENT BARONS WHOSE GOODWILL IS NEEDED TO KEEP PEACE, PROVIDED THEY CAN CONTROL THEIR TROPS WHICH ISN'T ALWAYS CLEAR. JUMBLATT, THE KEY BARON ON THE LEFT, HAS BEEN MIFFED FOR SEVERAL MONTHS BECAUSE HE IS OUT OF THE GOVERNMENT, AND HE HAS AMPLY SHOWN HIS ABILITY TO BE A SPOILER. CHAMOUN IS THE LEADING SPOKESMAN FOR THE CHRISTIAN RIGHT AND IS IN THE GOVERNMENT, BUT RECENT DAYS HAVE SHOWN THAT HE IS OBLIGED TO LISTEN TO CHRISTIANS FARTHER RIGHT REPRESENTED BY GEMAYEL. 'ARAFAT IS ANOTHER BARON. HIS MODERATE PALESTINIANS ARE BECOMING A FACTOR IN THE INTERNAL LEBANESE PICTURE AS MUCH AS ANYONE ELSE. IN ORDER TO PACIFY LEBANON, ALL THESE POWERFUL VOICES MUST SOMEHOW BE BROUGHT TOGETHER IN A MODUS VIVENDI. THIS HAS BEEN PRIMIN KARAME'S FRUSTRATING TASK.

WINNERS AND LOSERS

5. SYRIA IS A VITAL LINK IN THE SHOW GOVERNMENT, NOT ONLY ON ITS OWN BUT ALSO THROUGH THE SAIQA WING OF THE PLO. SYRIA IS NO LONGER JUST THE BIG BROTHER NEXT DOOR, BUT IS BEOMING VIRTUALLY THE ARBITER OF LEBANON'S DOMESTIC POLITICS. IRONICALLY, CONFIDENTIAL

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MANY RIGHTISTS IN THEIR FRUSTRATION WELCOME SYRIAN ASSISTANCE, BECAUSE OF SYRIA'S CURRENT MODERATION AND HOSTILITY TO THE EXTREME LEFT. SYRIA ITSELF SEEMS DIFFIDENT ABOUT ITS INTERVENTION, UNCERTAIN OF HOW TO PLAY THE TICKLISH LEBANESE POWER GAME AND SO FAR PRUDENTLY WARY LIKE EVERYONE OF ISRAEL'S REACTION. BUT ITS INCREASING INFLUENCE IS UNMISTAKABLE.

6. NEARLY ALL ELEMENTS OTHER THAN SYRIA AND THE PLO HAVE LOST GROUND, ALTHOUGH NOT ALL ARE AWARE OF IT. GEMAYEL UP- PARANTLY HAS WON WIDE ALLEGIANCE AMONG CHRISTIANS FOR HIS TOUGH DEFENSE OF TRADITION IN LEBANON. PRES FRANGIE'S DECLINE-- A PHENOMENON ACCELERATED BY HIS ZGHORTA SUPPORTERS' ITEM- PERATE ROLE IN THE STRIFE--PARADOXICALLY HAS HELPED GEMAYEL TO CAPTURE THIS ALLIGANCE. BUT STRATEGICALLY THE PHALANGE IS IN A NO-WIN POSITION AGAINST THE INSISTENT DEMANDS OF THE

MOSLEM MAJORITY AND THE LEFTISTS FOR A NEW CONSTITUTIONAL
ORDER AND SOCIAL REFORM. AS FOR JUMBLATT, HE HAS SHOWN

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AMEMBASSY MANAMA

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY PARIS

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HIS MUSCLE, BUT HE IS OFTEN A PRISONER OF THE FARTHER LEFT. HE LOST CONSIDERABLE FACE WHEN THE GENERAL STRIKE OF SEPT 15 HAD TO BE CALLED OFF. KARAME TOO HAS LOST, DESPITE HIS CONTINUING IMAGE OF THE NATION'S PEACEMAKER, FOR IN TRIPOLI HE HAS BEEN PARTLY PUSHED ASIDE BY THE PALESTINIANS AND THE LOCAL LEFTISTS LED BY FARUQ MUKADAM. WHETHER KARAME CAN REGAIN HIS PREVIOUS DOMINANCE IN THAT CITY REMAINS TO BE SEEN. THE SECURITY FORCES' MORALE HAS NEVER BEEN LOWER. THE SAME CAN BE SAID OF THE ARMY'S IN THAT IT HAS WITNESSED FOREIGNERS (FATAH, SAIQA) PLAYING ITS SECURITY ROLE.

NO SOLUTION IN SIGHT

7. LEBANON'S PLIGHT TODAY IS THAT NEITHER OF ITS TWO "GOVERNMENTS" HAS MET THE CHALLENGE IT FACES. ONLY WHEN THESE TWO SOURCES OF AUTHORITY MERGE INTO A SINGLE EFFECTIVE AUTHORITY WILL THE COUNTRY BE TRULY PACIFIED. FAR FROM MERGING, THEY ARE GROWING FARTHER APART AS VIOLENCE CONTINUES, SHOWING UP THE WEAKNESS OF THE FORMAL GOVERNMENT AND COMPLICATING THE ANARCHY INHERENT IN THE SHADOW GOVERNMENT. TRAGICALLY, NEARLY ALL FORCES EXCEPT THE EXTREME LEFT OF COMMUNISTS AND "REJECTIONISTS" WISH TO SEE SUCH A MERGER, BUT EACH ON ITS OWN TERMS. JUMBLATT'S LEFTISTS AND THE MOSLEMS WANT BASIC CHANGES AND, SMELLING BLOOD, ARE DRIVING A HARD BARGAN.

THE PHALANGE MEANWHILE STUBBORNLY REFUSES TO CONCEDE FUNDAMENTAL CHANGES IN THE NATIONAL PACT, BLIND TO THE FACT THAT VIOLENCE MERELY ACCELERATES THE DISINTEGRATION OF THE LEBANON THEY SEEK TO PRESERVE. AS FOR THE EXTREME LEFT, IT IS AN INHERENTLY WEAK GROUP BUT FULLY ABLE TO KEEP THE POT BOILING (UNLESS IT IS ISOLATED FAR MORE SUCCESSFULLY THAN HERETOFORE). THE COMMUNISTS AND "REJECTIONISTS" ARE MORE THAN WILLING TO STIR UP TROUBLE, SEEING A STEADY DETERIORATION OF LEBANESE POLITICAL VIABILITY TO BE THEIR OWN LONG-TERM ADVANTAGE.

8. SO THE FIGHT GOES ON, EACH DAY DESTROYING A BIT MORE OF LEBANON'S ECONOMIC PROSPERITY AND POLITICAL STRENGTH.
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NO ISSUE FROM THESE AFFLICTIONS IS NOW VISIBLE.
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